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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROUGHNECK

A Burlesque

By ROBERT GARLAND



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ROBERT GARLAND
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no 1

FOR
EUGENE MAC DONALD BONNER

First Produced
at
The Vagabond Theatre
Tuesday Evening, March 4th, 1919

CAST OF CHARACTERS

EUSTACE CARDELL, an idler.....Harry Welker
SYLVESTRE WALLESTONE, his friend,
Harold Clark
CLORILLA, his fiancée.....Edmonia Nolley
ALFALFA SMOOT, a truck driver,
B. Russell Murphy

SCENE: *The apartment of Eustace Cardell*

PERIOD: *The present*

PLACE: *New York City*

Produced by May Standish Rose

Setting by Oliver Carroll Zell

“THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROUGHNECK”

(A Burlesque)

EUSTACE CARDELL.....An Idler
SYLVESTRE WALLESTONE.....His Friend
CLORILLA.....His Fiancée
ALFALFA SMOOT.....A Truck Driver

Period: The Present

Place: New York City

The rising curtain reveals the studio of Mr. Eustace Cardell.

The apartment is furnished in the manner of the moment. There are Japanese tassels, cylindric sofa cushions, a decorated fish bowl, a yellow bird-cage with a red wooden occupant, a floor lamp, etc., etc., and several really interesting paintings in the school of Matisse. If it is true that the home reveals the man, you would say that the owner of the studio possessed a small amount of personality entirely surrounded by Vogue. There is a large window at the back of the room, and, beyond, a cherry tree sheds pale pink petals against a Belasco sunset.

EUSTACE CARDELL—our hero, as it were—lies full length on a couch of mild magenta silk, strumming Debussy on a lute. He would tell you, if asked, that he is playing the Second Arabesque, but you would be apt to think that Debussy is being used to cover a multitude of phonetic indiscretions. EUSTACE is the sort of man who wears a velvet house coat. You make him out to be a languid young idler of twenty-four or five; good-looking, cynical and well groomed, with a latent sense of humor in his straightforward eyes. The only thing he really needs is two years military training. You feel, somehow, that he has read too much Henry James and not enough Conrad.

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Nearby, his friend, SYLVESTRE WALLESTONE, is seated in a high-backed Jacobean chair. He wears a morning coat, white spats, a boutonnière and all that sort of thing. He carries a single eye-glass on a ribbon. His almost pure Greek profile is silhouetted against the glowing window, his feet are on a stool. As an object of art, SYLVESTRE is entirely satisfactory. He is the sort of person who spends his summers astonishing the natives of Provincetown.

EUSTACE finishes the Arabesque, and, after a few chords, sings softly, half to himself.

EUSTACE

(Singing)

For I'm in love with the furthest star,
So far is it away
That I do not know what its habits are,
This star so far away;
Oh, I'm in love with the furthest star
That faints in the Milky Way.

You're pale as absinthe, star o' mine,
Don't dally with the moon,
For she is wise, with fervid eyes
That make the senses swoon.
Oh, I'm in love——

SYLVESTRE

(With a sigh)

Oh, God, how life wearies me! If you love me, Eustace, do not sing. It is more, far more, than I can bear. Why was I born anachronistic?

EUSTACE

Who knows?

SYLVESTRE

Modernity hangs over me like a pall.

(A gentle breeze stirs the branches of the cherry tree and a shower of petals falls to the ground. SYL-

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VESTRE waves a languid hand in the direction of the window.)

Was it Whistler who pointed out that nature follows art?

EUSTACE

When a thing is true, who said it is of no importance? Any truism is vulgar and should remain anonymous. A lie is a work of art and should be signed and acknowledged by the artist.

SYLVESTRE

You are quite right, my friend. You yourself have been guilty of a truism. You have therefore been vulgar. But I forgive you.

EUSTACE

Pray do not forgive me. I cannot bear to be forgiven. We only forgive persons whose opinions are valueless. Forgiveness is the sincerest form of insult.

SYLVESTRE

Look at that absurd breeze plagiarizing Madame Butterfly.

EUSTACE

And without music, too! I shall accompany it.

(He strikes a few chords on his instrument. The breeze dies down and the petals cease to fall.)

Now it has stopped.

SYLVESTRE

How unappreciative nature is!

EUSTACE

And I play with great expression, too. I don't play at all accurately, anyone can play accurately, but I play with wonderful expression.

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SYLVESTRE

How can you say such things?

EUSTACE

I can't. Wilde said them for me

SYLVESTRE

Oh, how life wearies me!

(There is a pause. SYLVESTRE rises to light a cigarette. Lighting a cigarette is a ceremony with him.)

Wednesday is a ghastly day. It is neither the beginning of the week, nor the end.

EUSTACE

Wednesday is impossible. It suggests oak furniture, matinees, the suburbs and other unpleasant things. Wednesday is as middle-class as an easel, as unbelievable as an upright piano.

SYLVESTRE

I was born on a Wednesday.

EUSTACE

You would be.

SYLVESTRE

All the unpleasant things in my life have occurred on Wednesday.

EUSTACE

(Wearily)

Wednesday is a fatal day.

SYLVESTRE

Not only was I born on Wednesday, I was christened on Wednesday, although I believe I protested at the time. And, if I remember correctly, I was married on Wednesday.

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EUSTACE

Fancy!

SYLVESTRE

Friday is my lucky day; I was *divorced* on Friday.
Friday is a day of joy, that is, unless one is a fish.

EUSTACE

I should love to be a fish. I once wrote a beautiful poem about being a fish. I shall recite it to you.
(*He recites, accompanying himself on the lute*)

I wish
I were a fish;
To swim about
As does a trout
Would be my wish.

No one's suspicious of a fish;
A daring shad
Could not be bad
Were that his wish.

Live calm and cool,
Deep in a pool;
And when I die,
In state to lie
Upon a dish.

Oh, how I wish
I were a fish!

SYLVESTRE

Charming!

EUSTACE

I composed it one morning in the aquarium. My favorite fish, a peculiarly pensive pike, inspired it. I read it to an attendant, a rough sort of person with appreciative eyes. He said he thought so.

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SYLVESTRE

What an adventure!

EUSTACE

I am in a pale gray mood and would talk of love. A happy discontent holds me and will not let me go. I could lie here hour by hour and watch the tremulous spiral from your cigarette fade in the air like a faint, frail, frightened down.

SYLVESTRE

You talk as if you had been reading Schopenhauer.

EUSTACE

I feel as if I had been reading the Atlantic Monthly. The world and its toil seem far away, remote as a Jersey suburb. Let us shut out the sunset's bourgeois glare and light the candles upon the walls. Post-impressionism may be very well in art, but in nature it should be discouraged as one discourages pink postage stamps and pleasant people.

(SYLVESTRE rises with consummate artistry and draws the Venetian blinds. With heavy curtains he shuts out the bars of intruding light. Slowly, one by one, he lights the scented tapers ensconced about the room)

(EUSTACE strums on his lute, chanting his lay about the fish. He watches his friend with dreamy eyes. At last SYLVESTRE flings himself back into the Jacobean chair)

SYLVESTRE

How tired I am. Where is your man today?

EUSTACE

Poor Brooks! He is by way of becoming fashionable. He is lecturing at the Colony Club on "Matri-mony and the Masses."

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SYLVESTRE

Don't tell me Brooks is married.

EUSTACE

Not for the moment, but he has been married five times in the past six months.

SYLVESTRE

How optimistic!

EUSTACE

Marriage has become a habit with him. His last wife was a revolutionist. Before marriage she used to go out every evening and lecture to school girls on birth control.

SYLVESTRE

Did you ever see the creature?

EUSTACE

Heavens, yes. I met her lunching with Brooks at the Ritz. She was charming, really, and treated me almost as an equal. But marriage domesticated her, and as for birth control . . . well, my dear, she stayed home every evening and drove poor Brooks to the streets. He grew desperate and threatened to commit suicide or move to Chicago, I don't remember which. But let us not talk of Brooks.

SYLVESTRE

Tell me of Clorilla.

EUSTACE

Clorilla's love is coldly chaste, a pallid princess in an ivory tower. Nature, growing envious of Burne-Jones' stained-glass femininity, fashioned Clorilla in his school, almost succeeding, but not quite. Nature endowed her with a stained-glass exterior, but, I fear, Clorilla has a Shavian mind.

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SYLVESTRE

Poor dear Nature seldom quite succeeds. The best that she can do is fail successfully.

(There is a pause)

Tell me of Clorilla's love.

EUSTACE

Her love for me is a very precious thing. Her love for me is as precious as a new and untried sin. It is a love difficult to live down to. It is a love too true to be good. But, for the moment, we have parted, she and I.

SYLVESTRE

Parted? You and Clorilla have seen fit to part? How you intrigue me.

EUSTACE

Yes, we have parted. She endeavored to reform me. A woman who loves you is a trial and may be borne, but a woman who endeavors to reform you is a nuisance and should be abolished. Clorilla is one of those women who thinks a man can be done over as if he were a flat. So I abolished her.

SYLVESTRE

Eustace, I fear for you.

EUSTACE

Sylvestre, I fear for myself. But I shall be brave, never fear. And then, of course, one can always run.

SYLVESTRE

How brave you are, Eustace. I should as soon think of carrying on an intrigue with a bomb.

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EUSTACE

Clorilla has her strong points, heaven knows, but a strong point never fails to prick the bubbled iridescence of my lonely love.

SYLVESTRE

"The bubbled iridescence of my lonely love." How beautiful. It is like something from Verlaine.

EUSTACE

(Grasping his lute)

I could fashion a poem from it. I could fashion a sad, a beautiful poem from it, a poem something like this:

(He accompanies himself with a few broken chords)

The bubbled iridescence of my lonely love
Is as a thread of pale pink pallid smoke
Floating above the sad horizon of my soul—
My aching soul
And I am pregnant with a vague unrest
That seems to stir this weary heart of mine
Until I feel that all my being needs
Is—is——

SYLVESTRE

Calomel.

EUSTACE

Don't be vulgar, Sylvestre. Vulgarity is the last refuge of the ignorant. And calomel is only used by clergymen. I shall finish the verse some other time. It is quite as beautiful as Verlaine's absinthe-tinted song.

SYLVESTRE

We were speaking of Clorilla.

EUSTACE

Clorilla is a combination of clashing curiosity. I understand her, and I mistrust that which I under-

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stand. She is naturally sweet and healthy, poor dear, but in an attempt to appear intellectual she gives the impression of ingrowing discomfiture. She has a mind as romantic as a Chambers novel, but she talks like Henry James.

SYLVESTRE

No man could live with a woman who reminded him of "The Golden Bowl."

EUSTACE

You understand almost every individual word Clorilla utters, you sometimes catch the verb, but the subject of her conversation is as elusive as a New York theatrical manager.

SYLVESTRE

Speaking of managers, isn't it time to introduce a plot?

EUSTACE

Plots are for the provincial. As I told you, Clorilla and I parted several days ago, parted in unutterable anguish. The parting was superb. She, clever creature, was more like Ben-Ami than Ben-Ami would ever dare to be.

SYLVESTRE

Clorilla would be magnificently masculine at such a time. Words are but empty shells, hollow, meaningless, where Clorilla is concerned.

EUSTACE

(Intensely)

I wish you could have seen her, friend of mine. Her hair, where it caught the candlelight, glistened dully like a copper kettle, while in the shadow it bore the semblance of strawberry jam, so darkly red it

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was, so redly dark. Her gown, clinging to her like a frightened kitten to a tree, was the gorgeous green of the pulsing sea, overlaid with a beautiful bilious blue. But, oh, her face, her hopeless, heedless, helpless face! I wept at sight of it. Gray it was, the gray of ashen hopes, slashed by the careless crimson of her luscious, languid lips.

SYLVESTRE

Oh, my God, how resplendent she must have been, how sublime! Did not you fall before her concinnity?

EUSTACE

Her concinnity meant nothing to me, but her eyes drove me to despair. She looked into my face as if it were a clock and she were forty minutes late, and I trembled before her glance.

SYLVESTRE

What did she have to say?

EUSTACE

She would return, she said, within a day or two. If by that time I had not done myself over as she would have me to do, I would rue the day.

SYLVESTRE

I have often wished to "rue the day," but have never known just how to go about it.

EUSTACE

The words are hers; I have no idea what they mean, nor do I care. Yesterday I wrote and told her that I pleased myself entirely. I would not change, I could not change, not even for Clorilla.

(There is a knocking at the door)

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SYLVESTRE

(Dramatically)
Enter Clorilla!

EUSTACE

Fate pauses at my portal, Sylvestre.
(The knocking is repeated)
Kismet grows impatient; let it in.

SYLVESTRE

What a bore! What a beastly bore! Why don't people make sure one is out before they call?

(SYLVESTRE opens the door. CLORILLA enters. She looks as Nazimova did in "The Comet," only more so. She walks—"undulates" would be a far more faithful term—to where EUSTACE lies on the couch. He watches her approach with fascinated eyes. When she reaches the couch, he speaks)

EUSTACE

(Solemnly)
Clorilla, is it you?

CLORILLA

(Deeply)
Yes, Eustace, it is I.
(She picks up his lute and flings it across the stage)

I come fresh from the throbbing world outside to find you steeped in silk and incense, luting your very soul away. It's revolting. Have you no pride, no ambition? Have you no conception of life's vast responsibilities?

EUSTACE

(Rising)
Clorilla! Clorilla mia!

CLORILLA

Don't speak to me, not even in Italian. The ca-

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dence of your voice annoys me, your articulation drives me mad.

EUSTACE

At any rate, you can't say that I bore you.

CLORILLA

Nō, Eustace, I cannot say you bore me. I wish you did. If you bored me, I could marry you and live happy ever afterward. Mutual boredom is the foundation of all marital happiness, it makes the outside world so very interesting. No, Eustace, you do not bore me.

EUSTACE

Continue, Clorilla. The lilt of your voice is like a perfect poem; its rise and fall is like the sobbing of the sea. When you speak, it is as if Pablo Casals drew his bow across his 'cello. I can shut my eyes and hear the throb of Schumann's "Abendlied."

CLORILLA

(Suddenly fierce)

To think that I once gave my girlish love to you. To think of it. But I was innocent then, untarnished, undefiled. I did not know, dear God, I did not know. Now I have lived and loved and laughed; now I have found out that there is no Santa Claus. The goddess of adventure has kissed me on the brow, awakening me from my sweet unsullied sleep. The blindness of innocuousness has fallen from my eyes. At last I have learned to see.

EUSTACE

Clorilla, you are wonderful, superb. My eyes seem to have been renovated, too. I see you in a different light and my hungry heart is breaking with the need of you. Clorilla, may I be yours?

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CLORILLA

No. There's nothing I could do with you.

EUSTACE

You've no right to talk to me like that. We're not married—yet. We're not even engaged.

CLORILLA

I—married to you. Why, I hate you. I loathe you. I detest you. I abhor you. I—I——

SYLVESTRE

Would “abominate” be of any help?

EUSTACE

Many successful marriages are founded on a hate such as yours.

(SYLVESTRE, *who has closed the door, coughs nervously as he resumes his seat quietly.* CLORILLA *turns to his direction*)

CLORILLA

(*To SYLVESTRE*)

And I hate you too. I despise every man I ever knew now that I have found a real man. I abominate you and all your kind.

EUSTACE

You have found a real man? Do sit down, Clorilla, and tell us of your find.

SYLVESTRE

Yes, Clorilla, have a seat and tell us all about him.

(SYLVESTRE *gets a chair for her and helps her with her wraps. She arranges herself artistically.* SYLVESTRE *drops to a cushion on the floor*)

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EUSTACE

Pray proceed.

CLORILLA

(Effectively)

I have become engaged to a real man, a blondly beautiful man whom I plucked from a motor-truck as one plucks any flower in life's guileless garden. By profession he is the driver of a brewery truck. He thinks Omar Khayyam a new kind of drink and Shaw an upper class attempt at profanity, but by physical standards he is a god among gods, a young, lusty god of the olden, golden days. He sat above me in the Avenue, wrapped in blue shirted disdain, delivering near-beer to the Vanderbilts. And I craved him, tan shoes, checked cap and all.

EUSTACE

And they say romance is dead.

SYLVESTRE

Has he a name? They *do* have names, you know.

CLORILLA

His name is Smoot; Alfalfa Smoot.

SYLVESTRE

(Lyrically)

Smoot, Smoot; beautiful Smoot. Smoot of the evening, beautiful Smoot.

EUSTACE

Alfalfa Smoot! Where have I heard that name before? Why didn't you bring him in to tea?

CLORILLA

Mr. Smoot is here.

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EUSTACE

Here?

CLORILLA

My fiancé waits without.

EUSTACE

Why leave him outside as if he were a Ford? Does he not care for tea?

CLORILLA

Tea? He?

EUSTACE

Don't giggle, please. It doesn't become you.

CLORILLA

Tea! Tea indeed! Can you imagine my Alfalfa taking tea?

SYLVESTRE

While I do not know the habits of Alfalfa, it is quite the thing for his co-workers to descend from their motor-trucks to imbibe chocolate nut sundaes as a sort of breakfast aftermath. I see dozens of them at it every morning. Now anyone who could enjoy a chocolate sundae at 10 A. M. could not possibly object to a cup of tea at five in the afternoon.

CLORILLA

We have no time for trifles. Upon his motor-truck he brought me here, and upon his motor-truck will he carry me away. Disguised as a bottle of almost-beer, I rode beside him proudly, reverently. When the day was barely eleven hours old I met my love in the Avenue. A post-superman he appeared; big and brave and blond, and, oh! so strong. With tear-filled eyes I watched him carry a keg to the Carnegies, carry it upon his shapely shoulder as if

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it were much less than naught. I have seen him, with his two bare brown hands, toss beer-kegs about as if they were toy balloons. You, Eustace, he could crush between his fingers, and I have brought him here to show you what a superman can do. I have brought him here to kill you.

EUSTACE

To kill me? You would have him kill me?

SYLVESTRE

To kill him? You would have him murdered by Alfalfa?

CLORILLA

(To Eustace)

Yes. He is to kill you.

SYLVESTRE

(Approaching CLORILLA)

Be kind to him, friend of mine. See, he is all unnerved. His face is soda-cracker pale.

CLORILLA

(Dramatically)

He—must—die.

SYLVESTRE

(On his knees before her)

You, who are a woman, have pity on him. He does not want to die.

(Turning to EUSTACE)

You do not want to die, do you Eustace?

EUSTACE

No, not on Wednesday. It would break my mother's heart were I to die on Wednesday. Even father would be annoyed.

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SYLVESTRE

Have mercy, you who are so beautiful, so tender, so compassionate. · Clorilla, I entreat you, have a heart.

CLORILLA

He must die.

EUSTACE

(Sinking back on the couch)

No—no—no! I cannot die on Wednesday. Can't you put it off till Monday?

SYLVESTRE

(Rising)

You hear him, Clorilla. Grant the lad's request. Put it off till Monday. Come now, do.

CLORILLA

Monday? Why Monday?

EUSTACE

I have no engagements then.

CLORILLA

You must die—today.

SYLVESTRE

Monday is only five days off, I pray you. . . .

CLORILLA

He must die today. Alfalfa may be busy Monday.

EUSTACE

Wait until I've had my tea.

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CLORILLA

I cannot wait. Today is your day of death. No power on earth can change it now. The stars have spoken. You are to die. I pray you are prepared.

EUSTACE

I am a pacifist.

(Raising a gold whistle to her lips, CLORILLA sends a shrill, vibrant blast through the agitated atmosphere)

SYLVESTRE

God help you, amico mio.

(A moment later, Mr. Alfalfa Smoot enters hesitantly. You can see at a glance that the thrill of adventure has begun to wane, that his wait outside has given him time to think things over. Removed from his natural environment, he is very ill at ease. Intuitively he realizes that he does not belong. He is as incongruous as a porpoise in Fifth Avenue or a battleship in Denver. He is discordant and inappropriate, and he has the sense to know it. He is big and blonde and as supermanish as anyone could possibly desire. He is coatless and his blue shirt is open at the neck; a checked cap is clutched in his hirsute hand. Taken as a whole, ALFALFA SMOOT is well worth looking at, although for the moment he is not at his best. He shifts uneasily from foot to foot as CLORILLA takes him in with admiring eyes. He makes a move as if to exit suddenly)

CLORILLA

Oh, glorious creature, divine quintessence of concentrated manhood!

SMOOT

Yes'm.

CLORILLA

Oh, beauteous one, straight from the Book of the

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All and None! Oh, magnificent monarch of humanity, I adore you.

SMOOT

Yes'm.

(SMOOT has left the door open behind him and SYLVESTRE crosses the room to close it. In doing so, he passes in front of the truck-driver)

SYLVESTRE

I beg your pardon.

SMOOT

(Not to be outdone in politeness)

Granted.

EUSTACE

(From the couch)

Where have I heard that voice before?

(He rises on one elbow and looks SMOOT over carefully)

Good heavens, it's my friend of the aquarium. It is he who was the first to hear my poem about the fish.

I wish
I were a fish;
To swim about
As does——

SYLVESTRE

(Interrupting)

Behold Alfalfa Smoot, the fishes' friend.

(CLORILLA approaches SMOOT fearlessly and places her jeweled hand on his stupendous shoulder)

CLORILLA

Pay no attention to them, my superman. They are envious of your virility, they crave your marvelous manhood. Let them sneer at your stamina if they will, they know nothing of dynamics. You are a tower of strength, you are as a giant refreshed. My Atlas! My Hercules! My adamantine Antæus!

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SMOOT

Yes'm. Thank you, ma'am.

CLORILLA

My superman, would you do anything for me?

(SMOOT *looks uneasily about the room. He drops his cap and picks it up guiltily*)

Would you do anything for me?

SMOOT

(*Without conviction*)

Ye—Yes'm.

CLORILLA

(*Insistently*)

Anything?

SMOOT

Ye—Yes'm.

CLORILLA

Spoken like the hero that you are. These are heroic times, my man, and you are in tune with them.

(*She draws nearer to him*)

My hero! My Hector! Would that I could hang myself like a jewel about your neck.

SMOOT

Lady

CLORILLA

My blonde beast, my own true superman. Listen well to what I have to say. I teach you the superman, said Zarathustra. . . . Man is something to be surpassed. What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock, a thing of shame. And just the same shall man be to superman; a laughing stock, a thing of shame. I tell you; one must have chaos in one to give birth to a dancing star. Thus Zarathustra.

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SMOOT

(Conversationally)
Good-bye.

CLORILLA

My king.
(She makes as if to swoon in his arms, but SMOOT stands her on her feet)

SMOOT

Nix on de vampire stuff. I lost a watch dat way.
(He starts for the door)

CLORILLA

Come, Alfalfa dear. Don't desert me now.

SMOOT

(With a heavy attempt at wit)
I hear me beer-truck callin' me.

CLORILLA

Don't desert me now; don't fail me in my hour of direst need. I need you more than your beer-truck needs you. Alfalfa, do not depart.
(SMOOT hesitates)

SYLVESTRE

(To SMOOT)
You'd better go, my friend. Remember, he who hesitates is bossed.

CLORILLA

My superman will not desert me, never fear. He would not fail a maiden in distress.
(SMOOT, who is about to depart, becomes just a bit curious as to coming events. He lingers near the door)

Sylvestre, look at him. Look at him, I say. How Nietzsche would have worshipped him.

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SYLVESTRE

He'd be wonderful in Chicago.

CLORILLA

He'd be wonderful anywhere.

SYLVESTRE

Isn't he a bit out of drawing in the East?

CLORILLA

(Impatiently)

Out of drawing or not, I have brought him here to kill your friend.

(CLORILLA turns to EUSTACE, who is lying on the couch)

Eustace Cardell, your time has come to die. Take one last look at all the tawdry things you hold most dear, for you have but a little while to live. Take one last lingering look at your woosey Webers and your mad Matisses, for you cannot take them with you when you pass beyond the behind. Your days of futility are at an end.

SYLVESTRE

Yes, Eustace; pipe your Picassos and kiss your chaste Cezannes, for you have got to die.

CLORILLA

My heart bleeds for you, my Eustace, but your demise is a strategic necessity for me. Make, therefore, your fond farewells, for you and your lute will soon be forever silent. You have spurned my love and I am glad, for by your death I am benefiting all mankind.

SYLVESTRE

May he not admire his Maeterlinck, dote on his Dostoevsky for awhile?

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CLORILLA

No. We have no time to dally with Dostoevsky.
(Turning to EUSTACE)

Your hour has struck and you must die. You must die, not because you spurned my maidenly desire, but because you are what you are. You are too precious for this world of ours, too refined. When I look first at Alfalfa Smoot and then at you, when I——

SMOOT

Honest, Lady, I gotta be goin'.

CLORILLA

One moment, friend of mine, and you and I will depart hence hand in hand.

SMOOT

Honest, lady, I gotta be goin'—now.

CLORILLA

Before you go you must kill the man who is lying there in a detachment so perfect as to be almost alcoholic. To every man the chance of greatness comes but once; your chance is now at hand. Remember this, my friend; you are not killing him for me, but for society. You are killing him for all mankind.

SMOOT

I ain't got nothin' against dat——

CLORILLA

Ah, modest one, is it not glorious to benefit mankind?

SMOOT

I ain't got nothin' against dat guy. He's a good guy, he is. Honest to Gawd he is, lady. Dat day in de aquarium he gimme t'ree bits fer——

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROUGHNECK

CLORILLA

No matter what he gave you in the aquarium or elsewhere, you must not betray posterity. Your duty is plain; you have no right to hesitate. You must kill him—dead.

SMOOT

You ain't speakin' to me.

CLORILLA

Kill him for me, dear heart, if you will not do it for society. Kill him for me. Surely you will grant this slight request before you depart.

SMOOT

(Uneasily)

So help me, lady, I gotta go.

(CLORILLA tears a hat pin from her hat and slips it to him)

CLORILLA

Demolish him!

SMOOT

(Accepting the hat pin)

Yes'm.

CLORILLA

Puncture him with that.

SMOOT

Yes'm.

(SMOOT tiptoes over to the couch where EUSTACE lies. He holds the hat pin as if it were a bomb. He looks apprehensively about. When he reaches the couch he leans over EUSTACE and whispers noisily)

What's de matter wid de skoit?

EUSTACE

(Laying aside his book)

Zarathustra has spoken to her.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROUGHNECK

SMOOT

Come again?

EUSTACE

(Patiently)

Zarathustra has spoken to her.

SMOOT

Gawd! You don't say so.

EUSTACE

(Quoting Nietzsche)

Zarathustra stepped down the mountain side alone and met—Clorilla. Pure is Zarathustra's eye, my friend, nor doth any loathsomeness lurk about his mouth.

SMOOT

Yes, sir.

EUSTACE

(Still quoting)

Doth Zarathustra not skip like a dancer? Doth he not——

SMOOT

(Knowingly)

Ohhhh! I got yuh, Steve.

EUSTACE

I felt sure you'd understand.

SMOOT

You ought 'a' told me in de foist place.

(EUSTACE rises unhurriedly and hands SMOOT a banknote)

EUSTACE

And now, Smoot, I think you'd best be going. Any dramatic value you may have possessed has now waned. You are already an anticlimax.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROUGHNECK

SMOOT

Yes, sir.

EUSTACE

If I can ever do anything for you——

SYLVESTRE

Or I.

SMOOT

(Departing)

Thank yuh, sirs. Thank yuh kindly. I'll tell my wife about your kindness; mebbe she'll name the new baby after youse.

SYLVESTRE

That would be delightful. Eustace Sylvestre Smoot would make a charming name. Goodbye, and good luck to you.

EUSTACE

Goodbye, Smoot. Take care of yourself.

SMOOT

Thank yuh, sirs.

(He touches his forehead after the manner of his ancestors)

Good day, and thank you both.

(As SMOOT goes out, CLORILLA looks after him with speechless wonderment)

SYLVESTRE

Aren't you going to speak to Smoot? This is no time to cut Alfalfa.

(Exit SMOOT)

EUSTACE

(Approaching CLORILLA)

Come, Clorilla; come, my love, to me. Mind, you see, has once more triumphed over matter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROUGHNECK

(As EUSTACE speaks, CLORILLA, a faded fragile flower, falls faintly to the floor. EUSTACE bends adoringly over her)

How helpless you are, my darling, and how dear. Nothing shall ever take you from me, you sweet, timid, clinging woman-thing.

(At this, CLORILLA raises herself on her elbow. Turning on EUSTACE like a maddened animal, she bites him on the thumb)

CLORILLA

(Shrieking)

You—you—you dilettante!

(At this insidious insult a ghastly neolithic, if not paleolithic cry springs from EUSTACE'S lips. With his uninjured hand he deals her a stinging blow on the corpus. CLORILLA is almost overcome with joy)

Eustace, my Eustace, strike me again. Again! Again!!

(EUSTACE does as he is told)

Dear heart, dear heart of oak, I have found my superman at last. I have found my superman and he is—YOU!

(CLORILLA faints ornamentally in his arms)

SYLVESTRE

Good heavens! I never dreamed that Eustace was a roughneck!

(The Curtain falls swiftly)



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